

The New Profession – Home Inspectors**IMPORTANT NOTICE - to be read first!**

Please note that this commentary was - self evidently - prepared before the Government decided to withdraw Home Condition Reports from the standard Pack contents. Presently, all the Training Organisations listed in this PPN say they will continue to offer Home Inspector training and ABBE is to continue with the Diploma in Home Inspection. Therefore the majority of this Note should still be fairly accurate but, and this is a big but, the Department will be revising the HIP Regulations shortly and everything may yet change further. You have been warned! For details of the latest position, please go to: <http://www.davidperkins.co.uk/HIPS/HIP-News>

Introduction

1. Part 5 of the Housing Act 2004 provides for new procedures which are to be followed whenever a residential property is sold. The new system is due to become mandatory from 1 June 2007 with Government spokesmen adamant that this target date will be met. However the final Regulations and Certification Standards have recently been published and contain an extensive amount of detailed material - over 600 pages all told! While, on a quick read, nothing appears directly to contradict these comments and information anyone seriously minded to become a Home Inspector must read them all carefully. They are all available on the web-site: <http://www.davidperkins.co.uk/HIPS/HIP-News>.
2. The simplest way to describe the new system – which will apply to anyone selling property, not just estate agents – is to say that the pre-sale preparation work conventionally undertaken for sales by public auction must in future be followed for all types of sale, including private treaty. The prescribed collection of legal and directly related general information will be known as a ‘Home Information Pack’ (HIP) in England and Wales and a ‘Purchaser’s information Pack’ (PIP) in Scotland – where very similar Regulations will be brought into force to those for England and Wales.
3. Having said HIPs will closely resemble an Auction Pack, there will be one important additional feature: every HIP (other than those for a brand new or newly occupied building) must include a report of a recent professional inspection of the property known as a Home Condition Report (HCR). The exact details of the HCRs will set out in the forthcoming Regulations, structured to ensure as high a degree of objectivity and standardisation as possible.

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4. In England and Wales, the HCRs will be similar in some respects to a category 2 inspection, such as a Home Buyers' Survey & Valuation Report (HBSV), although somewhat simplified with a condition rating (1 to 3) allocated to a comprehensive list of specified features. What is totally new is a SAP-style Energy Efficiency Report. They will not include a valuation and be prepared by trained individuals to be known as Home Inspectors (HI).
5. In Scotland, a similar-style of report will be called a '*Pre-Sale Survey*' (PPS). It will include the same energy efficiency report and, additionally, an indicative valuation – basically as guidance to prospective buyers. However the Scottish Executive has decided against creating a new profession of HIs in Scotland where the PSSs will be prepared by chartered surveyors who will have had short extra training over standardised PSSs.

Qualifying as a Home Inspector

6. Since the original idea for statutory HIPs there have been numerous suggestions over who might be appropriately qualified to become a HI and what training and regulatory criteria should apply. Initially SAVA – Surveyors and Valuers Accreditation – was commissioned to handle various trials and investigations and consequently SAVA accreditation was then seen as the main assessment route to becoming a HI. Subsequently, concern has grown over the question of numbers as something in excess of 7,500 fully qualified and officially certified HIs will, realistically, be required to be operational by June 2007 – and SAVA is now one of several organisations involved with training these potential inspectors.
8. The Government's latest, and hopefully final, decision is to give overall responsibility for both the training and final examination of HIs to the Award Body for the Built Environment (ABBE) which is part of the Birmingham-based University of Central England.

The Award Body for the Built Environment
University of Central England
Birmingham B42 2SU

Tel: 0121 331 5174
Fax: 0121 331 6883

The website is: <http://www.abbeqa.co.uk/diphi.asp>

9. To avoid confusion, presently, there is only this single route to becoming a HI. That means that all individuals, whatever their present professional background, must undertake an assessment process leading to a single qualification – the Diploma in Home Inspection which carries the designatory letters, DipHI.
10. The ABBE diploma course has been accredited by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and formally endorsed by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) – successor to the Office of Deputy Prime Minister. Currently the Secretary of State is the Rt. Hon. Ruth Kelly PC MP while the Minister of State responsible for the project remains Yvette Cooper MP. The Departmental officials are unchanged.
11. While this qualification procedure may be further reviewed at any stage by the DCLG, presently, the sole route to becoming a HI is to obtain an ABBE Diploma. This is a Vocationally Related Qualification set at Level 4 in the National Qualifications Framework and, accordingly, equates to a Higher National Diploma, or a Foundation Degree.

Obtaining the DipHI Qualification

12. In a nutshell, all candidates must provide evidence that they have both the necessary underpinning knowledge, and the practical competence required to do the job. This will involve producing reports for assessment, the satisfactory completion of the ABBE external examination and, if appropriate, undergoing a structured professional interview. Clearly, for an experienced chartered building surveyor, this should be a much quicker and easier process than for anyone totally new to the profession.

The ABBE Approved Assessment Centres

13. There are several ABBE-approved Assessment Centres (AAC) – which are listed here in alphabetical order:

Association of Building Engineers
Luyten's House
Billing Brook Road
Weston Favell
Northampton NN3 8NW
Tel: 01604 404121
Fax: 01604 784220
E-mail: kate.borrill@abe.org.uk

BRE Assessment Centre
Garston
Watford
WD25 9XX
Tel: 01923 664829
Fax: 01604 664789
E-mail: inspector@bre.co.uk

Institute of Maintenance and Building Management
Keets House
30 East Street
Farnham
Surrey GU9 7SW
Tel: 01252 710994
Fax: 01252 737741
E-mail: idimbm@btconnect.com

Morgan Whittaker
72 New Bond Street
Mayfair
London W1S 1RR
Tel: 08707 466 472
Fax: 08707 466 473
E-mail: info@morganwhittaker.co.uk

North Devon College
Old Sticklepath Hill
Barnstaple
North Devon EX31 2BQ
Tel: 01271 338 215
Fax: 01271 338 121
E-mail: mark.kelly@ndevon.ac.uk

Safe as Assessment Centre
The RICS Optimus Assessment Centre
Surveyor's Court
Coventry CV4 8JE
Tel: 0870 333 1600
Fax: 0207 334 3845
E-mail: safeas@rics.org.uk

SAVA
PO Box 5603
Milton Keynes
MK5 8XR
Tel: 0870 837 6565
Fax: 0870 837 6566
E-mail: info@sava.org.uk

14. In addition to the AAC, listed above, ABBE has also accredited several other organisations which offer either an academic course, a relevant training programme or similar assistance to those wishing to undertake a Diploma course. Note: new organisations are occasionally added to these lists, so neither is necessarily accurate. Please check with the ABBE website for the latest position – www.abbeqa.co.uk. Currently there are four of these ABBE Accredited Providers:

Adapt Assessment
Suite 2 – 31 Station Road
Cheadle Hulme
Cheshire SK8 5AF
Tel: 0161 282 7984
Fax: 0161 282 7983
E-mail: enquiries@adaptassessment.com

Home Inspector Training Ltd
4th Floor
Tolworth Tower
Ewell Road
Tolworth
Surrey KT6 7EL
Tel: 0208 335 1780
Fax: 0208 339 9339
E-mail: paulw@beahomeinspector.co.uk

Preston College Onsite Assessment
St Vincents Road
Fulwood
Preston
Lancashire PR2 8UR

Tel: 01772 225261
Fax: 01772 225002
E-mail: pc4u@preston.ac.uk

School of Product Design and Engineering
University of Wales
Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YB

Tel: 0292 041 6749
Fax: 0292 041 6286
E-mail: scousins@uwic.ac.uk

A Word of Warning

15. Please note that the only approved route to the HI qualification is the ABBE Diploma and currently the only organisations recognised by ABBE are those listed above. This may change and hence the point about regularly checking with the ABBE website. However HIPs, HCRs and HI training are being seen by many as a big business opportunity and estate agents are receiving numerous offers of training and assistance. Please remember that only those listed here (or subsequently approved by ABBE) are legitimate.

Existing Professional Qualifications

16. The fact is all potential HI must obtain an ABBE DipHI before they can apply for their formal certification as a HI and while the route to this qualification is basically the same for all applicants, any existing professional skills may contribute towards the qualification providing they satisfy part of the Diploma course requirements. Other professional and academic qualifications, which have been formally accredited by ABBE covering parts of the Diploma course, may also contribute to obtaining the necessary qualifications. The exact criteria are, to an extent, negotiable.

The Detailed Requirements

17. Every candidate must satisfactorily complete for presentation an acceptable portfolio of evidence proving their competence (in terms of both skills and knowledge) in all the units of the ABBE Diploma in Home Inspection.

18. This portfolio must include ten reports made following their personal inspection of a variety of properties with at least three of the reports being presented in the approved HCR format. The remaining reports should be similar in nature to the HCR, such as the HBSV or of a higher standard and category 3. Finally all candidates must pass an examination administered by ABBE. This is a link to an example of a Diploma in Home Inspection examination: <http://tinyurl.com/etym6> – copy this across to your search engine.

The Procedure

19. The first step for all potential Inspectors is to register with one of the ABBE approved Assessment Centres, as listed above, when each candidate will be allocated a Personal Assessor. As these various Centres differ both in their facilities and the type of approaches on offer it is suggested candidates contact them all to compare the service and support available to find the most appropriate and convenient for them.

20. Once an individual has identified his own personal skills gap it will be necessary to undertake the appropriate training to fill these gaps. This must be through completion of an accredited course or one that provides an adequate level of training and is acceptable to the Assessment Centre. A comprehensive record of all the training undertaken must be attached to the portfolio of work submitted.

21. The portfolio should include copies of all the inspections undertaken and the associated reports. Where more than ten suitable reports are being submitted candidates should identify those which are to be evaluated by the Assessment Centre. Once a portfolio has been accepted by a Centre it must finally be approved by ABBE.
22. The Assessment Centre will advise on how and when the external examination may be taken. Currently, this examination is paper based, but an electronic version is being tested. The examination itself takes about two hours and, as remarked, there is a link to an example examination on: <http://tinyurl.com/etym6>. (Copy this into your search engine).
23. After acceptance of the portfolio, and successful completion of the examination, the Assessment Centre will award an ABBE Diploma in Home Inspection and with it the right to carry the professional designatory letters Dip HI.
24. Of course, before any HI can start to prepare HCRs, they will also have to comply with the other requirements of the Certification Authority, covering PI obligations, etc. However the details of these aspects are still under discussion and beyond the scope of this paper. They will be set out shortly by the DCLG and incorporated in the Regulations.

Compiling a Personal Portfolio

25. More detailed information is available from the various AAC which were listed above but basically the new Diploma consists of five Units. The first three Units deal with '*Business and Interpersonal Skills*' while Units 4 and 5 deal with inspection and reporting, and cover the '*Technical Skills*' required.
26. There are a variety of ways in which the evidence in a portfolio can be provided, such as:
 - reference to appropriate qualifications, academic achievements, CPD records and the satisfactory completion of accredited or other suitable training courses;
 - witness statements which will be useful in confirming basic knowledge and experience of the business and interpersonal skills; and
 - where a candidate works under a Quality Assurance (QA) regime – for example, with a Local Authority or an Organisation which operates an accredited QA programme – then a statement confirming that their work has been audited and undertaken in accordance with the QA regime may well be acceptable.
27. It is recommended that at an early stage every candidate has a structured professional interview with their Assessor where he can suggest how best to fill possible gaps in the individual's portfolio. Some Assessment Centres hope to provide an accompanied HCR inspection as part of this advisory appraisal.

Putting together the Reports

28. Candidates without any previous experience in producing survey reports, must undertake ten HCRs supported with full reports and site notes. Three of the HCRs must also have photographs and energy performance data attached. For these sample reports properties which are not currently on the market for sale may be inspected, including property belonging to the candidate or his family. The Assessor must accompany all candidates on at least three of these inspections none to their own homes however.

29. When a candidate has had previous professional experience of producing reports which are acceptable to ABBE (generally speaking this applies to those who hold a MRICS, FRICS, or equivalent qualification), seven of these ten reports may be ones previously prepared leaving a minimum of three which must be in the HCR format.
30. The Assessor must accompany each candidate on at least one of these three HCR inspections, unless their prior reports have all been subject to a satisfactory QA audit. In this case, the prior reports, including site notes, must be fully identified, but do not necessarily have to be produced for submission unless the Centre asks for them.

The Assessment Process

31. The individual's Personal Assessor will examine and approve (or reject) the portfolio. To maintain equality of standards an Internal Verifier working within each Assessment Centre will verify the assessment process and there is also an External Verifier appointed by ABBE who will audit the procedures adopted by each Assessment Centre as well as undertaking random checks on the internal verification systems.

How long will it take to achieve the Diploma?

32. The time required to achieve the Diploma in HI depends to a great extent on the extent of the skills' gaps for each candidate. For those with extensive prior knowledge and experience of similar work (such as a RICS qualification), the period could be as short as several weeks. For candidates with no knowledge or experience, the time-scale is likely to take upwards of eighteen months or two years dependent on the type of training being undertaken, and whether full- or part-time.

What will the Diploma cost?

33. Finally, it should be appreciated that a full training course of this kind, leading to a new career opportunity, will cost several thousand pounds and is not a project to be undertaken lightly. There will be no standard charges prescribed by the DCLG and each Assessment Centre will have their own schedule of fees. In addition the new Regulatory Authority will levy fees and charges and HIs will then have to pay a fee to register each individual HCR on the system.

And finally . . .

As remarked in the introduction, the Department will shortly be revising the HIP Regulations in the light of the decision to drop mandatory HCRs and hence everything may change further. For details of the latest position, please go to:

<http://www.davidperkins.co.uk/HIPS/HIP-News>

An important caveat ... while this guidance material has been produced with great care and is believed to comply with the law and best professional practice it is only an opinion and neither David Perkins, nor David Perkins & Co., can accept any liability or be held responsible in any way for its accuracy as only the courts may interpret the law.

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